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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine how Washington, D.C., reporters cover business policy issues and to explain why they report this news as they do. The study used J. Grunig's situational theory of communication behavior as a basis for developing a typology of Washington reporters based upon their perceptions of four business policy issues. A sample of 160 reporters responded to questions that measured problem recognition, level of involvement with each issue, recognition of reporting constraints, and a presence of a referent criterion, both for themselves and as they perceived their readers would respond. Canonical correlation identified five reporter publics, two which appeared to be motivated by individual information needs, one which followed its personal information needs so long as it believed the news also met reader information needs, and two that seemed to be controlled by institutional factors, reporting news that they thought affected everyone or that they thought would interest their readers. Only one reporter public, termed science environmental reporters, had a consistent antibusiness bias. The findings suggest that Washington reporters do not cover negative aspects of business because they dislike business, rather they pay little attention to business until its behavior affects their readers. (FL)

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Public Relations Division

COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR OF WASHINGTON REPORTERS ON BUSINESS POLICY ISSUES

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COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR OF WASHINGTON REPORTERS ON BUSINESS POLICY ISSUES

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Abstract

Washington and the Washington press corps today intrude heavily into the decision making processes of business corporations. As a result, public affairs has become the "growth function" of public relations. The Washington media have two agenda setting roles in the business policy process. They inform the public, and articulate demands on government made by activists and pressure groups.

Business leaders believe the press has an anti-business bias that distorts these agendas. Recent "communicator" research suggests, however, that personal interests, perceptions of audience interests, constraints of media organizations, and institutional journalistic routines explain the behavior of journalists better than "bias."

This study used Grunig's situational theory of communication behavior as a basis for developing a typology of Washington reporters based upon their perceptions of four business policy issues: acid rain, chemical disposal sites, the break-up of the Bell System, and decentralization of natural gas. A sample of 160 reporters responded to questions to measure problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and presence of a referent criterion; both for themselves and as they perceived their readers would respond. Other questions measured passive and active communication behavior of the reporters and actual writing of stories on the four topics.

Canonical correlation identified five reporter publics. Two of these publics appear to be motivated by individual information needs. One public follows its personal information needs as long as it believes the news also meets reader information needs. The other two reporter publics seem to be controlled by institutional factors. They report news that affects everyone or that they think will interest their readers. Only one reporter public--of science/environmental reporters--had a consistent anti-business bias.

The paper concludes that Washington reporters do not cover negative aspects of business because they dislike business. They pay little attention to business until its behavior affects their readers. And business affects the public most when it does something that has negative consequences on the readers.

COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR OF WASHINGTON REPORTERS
ON BUSINESS POLICY ISSUES

Within the last decade, Washington and the Washington press corps have intruded heavily into the decision making of major American corporations. Antitrust suits, environmental regulations, economic policy, health and safety regulations, taxation, and numerous other federal policy issues threaten the autonomy and profitability of the corporation. As a result, the public affairs function--programs to communicate to publics about governmental policy issues--have become the 'growth discipline in public relations.'1

The Washington press corps plays an important role in setting federal policy--'principles that govern the use of political authority'--toward business.2 According to Cobb and Elder, the media serve two agenda-setting roles. They inform publics about the outputs--the decisions and regulations--of the policy process. They also articulate demands on government by activists and set the agenda for government decision makers by 'stimulating, filtering, and structuring the inputs of the policy process.'3

Corporate public affairs specialists, therefore, pay great attention to the Washington press corps because it provides a conduit for information that flows into government and to publics throughout the country. Business leaders, however, generally believe that the media have an anti-business bias that allows more negative than positive information about business to flow through this conduit.4 As a result, they have developed economic education

programs for journalism students in the hope that more knowledge about business and economics will reduce the media's supposed anti-business bias.5 Business leaders have also set up centers to study business-press relations and to criticize press performance, an example being the nonprofit Media Institute in Washington that is "working for more comprehensive, analytical and balanced news coverage of American business and economic affairs."6

Recent research suggests, however, that "bias" provides a relatively weak explanation for the behavior of journalists. Personal interests, perception of audience interests, the constraints of media organizations, and institutional journalistic routines, for example, seem to explain that behavior better. Thus, programs to challenge or change anti-business bias may have little, if any, effect.

In this article, I use a situational theory of communication behavior to conceptualize the behavior of reporters. I then report the results of a study that tests that theory by examining how and why a sample of Washington reporters cover four business policy issues. The research should enhance our understanding of the behavior of journalists. That understanding should help corporate public affairs officers to cope better with members of the Washington press corps who determine whether corporate policy views enter the conduit to government and to organizational publics.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Previous Theories. "Communicator analysis"--study of the behavior of professional communicators--has only recently begun to interest a substantial number of mass communication researchers. It is not a new communication research domain, however, as it can be

traced to the study of media gatekeepers that began with White's 1950 study of the wire editor he called Mr. Gates.7 Most of the gatekeeper studies have been of editors, however, rather than of reporters.

Most of the early researchers who studied gatekeepers assumed that behaviors of gatekeepers were autonomous, individual behaviors. Thus, they used individual variables, such as attitudes or predispositions, to explain that behavior. With increasing frequency, however, gatekeeper research showed that the decisions of journalists result more from organizational and societal constraints than from autonomous, individual decisions.8 According to Hirsch, this communicator research has been done at three levels of analysis: 1) individual (including such variables as the 'ideals' or values of journalists), 2) organizational (e.g., variables such as the relationship between reporters and editors), and 3) inter-organizational and institutional (e.g., such variables as journalistic traditions or economic requirements).9

White's Mr. Gates study illustrates an individual-level theory: White concluded that Mr. Gates' news decisions were 'biased and subjective.' Many individual-level theorists also have looked for subjectivity in journalistic behavior. For example, Janowitz typed journalists as either neutral 'gatekeepers' or subjective advocates of a position. 10 Starck and Soloski typed journalists as either 'neutrals' or 'partipants' in the news event.11 Most of these individual theories, therefore were much like early theories of audience behavior. They characterized journalistic behaviors as motivated by attitudinal, evaluative variables--a position much like that attributed to journalists by business people.

Whitney reviewed these studies, however, and concluded that the results could be better explained with organizational and institutional variables than individual variables. "In short," he concluded, "'real news' is an organizational product born of routines."12 For example, McCombs and Shaw reviewed White's Mr. Gates' data and found that Mr. Gates' selections of stories were highly correlated with the kinds of stories that came over the wire.13 The more stories in a given category on the wire, the more of those stories Mr. Gates chose, regardless of his subjective biases. Whitney also described several recent phenomenological and sociological studies of how the media "manufacture" news--e.g., Tuchman's book, Making News.14 Whitney concluded that these studies characterize news as "constructed" through "interaction with peers, organization superiors, and news sources."15

The most frequently cited organizational variable is the constraints placed upon reporters by their editors or other superiors--i.e., the stories they are assigned or expected to cover. That variable probably has little relevance for a study of Washington reporters, however, as Hess reported that Washington reporters experienced few constraints from their editors.16 They told Hess that the home office generally was too far away and out-of-sight to affect them. Sixty-nine percent of the time they initiated their own stories, 11 percent of the time the story came from the home office, and 10 percent of the time it came from a bureau chief. Fifty-one percent of their stories were never edited at all, the reporters added.

Hess's study, however, showed the importance of institutional and interorganizational variables--the interaction of reporters

with the social system at large and other media organizations, including news sources and other reporters--in explaining the behavior of Washington reporters. Hess found that 80 percent of Washington news is about "events" that occurred within 24 hours. He also concluded that most news comes from interviews and not document research, and that most gets funneled through Capital Hill. Most reporters cover what the other reporters cover to protect themselves from being scooped. The wire services play an especially important role because home editors use wire reports to determine whether their reporters have missed a story. Reporters, therefore, do not try to get stories their competitors don't have. They make sure they get the same stories as their competitors. The result is an institutional routine.17

Sigal classified the sources of 1,146 stories in the Washington Post and New York Times.18 Like Hess, he found that most stories--58 percent--came from such routine sources as official proceedings, press releases, or press conferences. Another 16 percent came from informal sources: briefings, leaks, meetings, or conventions. Only 26 percent of the stories came from "enterprise" reporting: interviews or the reporter's own analysis.

In addition to individual, organizational, and institutional variables, journalistic behavior has also been explained by the perceptions that journalists have of their audiences. That "coorientational" variable mixes levels of analysis--individual and institutional. Several years ago, for example, Tannenbaum and his colleagues found that journalists sensationalized news about mental health because they thought their audiences wanted that kind of presentation.19 Washington reporters may also choose to write

about stories they think will interest their readers. If they do, their perceptions probably are inaccurate, as Hess reported that Washington reporters are "isolated from their consumers."20

The Situational Theory. In this study, a situational theory I had developed to explain when and why people communicate was used to describe the communication behavior of a sample of Washington reporters. I have used the theory before to identify publics of organizations and to describe their communication behaviors.21 In this study, I used the theory to segment Washington reporters into organizational publics. Adding coorientational variables to the theory made it possible to incorporate the three levels of analysis into the theory and to make inferences about how the three levels influence the communication behavior of the reporter publics identified by the research.

The theory assumes that people communicate when they perceive a need to cope with a specific situation (e.g., a personal problem such as insects in the garden, or a policy issue such as restrictions on steel imports). It rejects the assumption that attitudinal or other predispositional variables motivate communication behavior. The theory contains three independent variables that describe perceptions of the situation: 1) problem recognition--whether a person has a "need for information" that causes him or her to stop to think about a situation, 2) constraint recognition--whether the person thinks he can personally do something about a situation, and 3) level of involvement--whether the person connects himself with the situation.

The theory also contains two dependent communication variables: active information seeking and passive information proces-

sing. Information seeking describes what Clarke and Kline have called "premeditated information seeking"--"the planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specified topic." Information processing describes what they call "message discovery"--"the unplanned discovery of a message, followed by continued processing of it."22

People actively seek information when they have a high level of problem recognition and level of involvement and a low level of constraint recognition. These three perceptions of the situation also increase passive communication behavior because they make it more likely that people will pay attention to information that comes to them randomly. Level of involvement, however, has less of an effect upon information processing than does problem recognition and constraint recognition, and less of an effect on information processing than on information seeking. People seldom actively seek information about situations that do not involve them. Yet they will randomly process information about low involvement situations, especially if they also recognize the situation as a problem.23

A fourth variable, presence of a referent criterion (whether the person thinks he or she knows a solution for a given issue), has been treated as an independent variable in previous research. I had theorized that a person with a "solution" needs less information to resolve a problematic situation. In previous research, however, the referent criterion concept has explained little of the variance in communication behavior.

However, the previous research suggests that the referent criterion functions more as a dependent variable than as an independent variable. The other three independent variables, in other

words, not only motivate people to communicate, they also motivate people to use the information they receive to construct a referent criterion. In this study, presence of a referent criterion was used in the statistical analysis both as an independent and dependent variable. The highest correlations resulted when it was treated as a dependent variable. Thus it was treated that way in the remaining data analyses.

In addition to using this situational theory to explain the occurrence and nature of communication behavior, I have recently used it to explain when communication will have four possible effects.24 These effects include: 1) retention of messages, 2) holding of cognitions (ideas), 3) holding of attitudes (evaluations of ideas), and 4) behaviors. That research showed that the theory can predict when each of the effects will occur, but not the direction of that effect. For example, the three independent variables explain when people will evaluate (hold an attitude about) how well business has handled such issues as air pollution or product safety, but not whether they will evaluate business performance in those areas favorably or unfavorably.

The Theory and Reporter Behavior. When reporters report the news they obviously engage in communication behavior. The literature clearly suggests that reporter communication behavior can consist of active information seeking--enterprise reporting--or passive information processing--stories based on events, press conferences, leaks, briefings, press releases, etc. A previous study, which used the theory to identify journalism student publics that form from business and economic issues, also showed that the three variables explained the communication behavior of student

journalists better than did the students' attitudes or biases toward business--thus suggesting that the variables could also explain the behavior of practicing journalists better.25

To identify Washington reporter publics, we asked questions to measure the problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement of a sample of reporters on four business policy issues. We then correlated these three variables with measures of hypothetical information processing (how likely each reporter said he would be to write a story about each of the four issues that came from a 'news conference, press release, or research report or from a news source who calls in the information'), hypothetical information seeking (whether the the reporter thought he would research each story further to do a more in-depth article), and of the actual number of stories each reporter had written about the four issues in the last year.

The four issues chosen were being widely discussed at the time of the survey (April 1981). Each issue fit one cell of a four-cell matrix that described the range of business issues reported by the media. Two issues were chosen because business corporations had taken a positive stance on them--corporations had initiated the discussion to present their point-of-view. Two issues were chosen as negative issues--issues raised by business critics on which corporations communicated to defend their position. One of the negative and one of the positive issues was chosen as a likely high-involvement issue. One negative and one positive issue also was chosen as a likely low-involvement issue. Deregulation of natural gas prices was the positive, high-involvement issue; break-up of the Bell telephone system was the low-invovement, positive is-

sue; chemical disposal sites was the high-involvement negative issue; and acid rain was the low-involvement, negative issue.26

We also asked reporters to answer the problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement questions as they thought their readers and their editors would respond. We expected the relative correlations of the "self," "reader," and "editor" scores with the three communication variables to show whether the individual, organizational, or institutional levels would best explain the three reporter communication variables. After a pretest of the questionnaire, however, the editor questions were dropped. Nearly all of the reporters who participated in the pretest said they could not predict how their editors would respond because they rarely talked with them--confirming Hess's report of limited organizational constraints on Washington reporters.

To determine the relationship between reporter behavior and knowledge of business, we asked reporters questions written to measure a set of cognitive variables developed by Stamm and Grunig.27 We asked reporters the extent to which they believed a factual statement about each issue preferred by business (e.g., "deregulation of natural gas will stimulate further exploration that will help resolve the energy crisis and dependence on foreign oil") and a statement preferred by critics of business (e.g., "deregulation will put a tremendous financial burden on American consumers"). A reporter who believed only one of these statements has a cognitive structure that Stamm and Grunig described as "wedging." On the other hand, a reporter who believed both statements would be "hedging." If business leaders are correct when they argue that reporters perceive business as having only negative attributes,

then reporters should be found to be holding the anti-business belief and wedging out the pro-business belief.

We also measured reporter evaluations of (attitudes toward) policy prescriptions for the four issues. For example, we asked how much each reporter agreed that "The U. S. government should stop controlling the price of natural gas." If reporters do indeed have an anti-business "attitude," they should have rejected this position.28

We did not expect to find that any one variable or level of variables would explain the communication behavior of all Washington reporters. Instead, we expected to find several reporter publics, and expected to find that some variables would explain the behavior of some of the publics but not of others. We did expect that the independent variables of the situational theory would correlate positively with the dependent communication behaviors and effects when submitted to a canonical correlation analysis, as they had in past studies. However, a lack of correlation could be significant also. It would suggest that reporter decisions result more from organizational and institutional variables than from their personal perception of the situation.

Thus, we organized the study around two central research questions:

Q1: What kinds of Washington reporter publics will be identified by a canonical correlation between measures of a reporter's self and predicted audience problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition and measures of the reporter's information seeking, information processing, actual coverage of issues, presence of a referent criterion, and the holding of cognitions and attitudes on the four business policy issues?

Q2: Will any of the reporter publics identified by cannonical variates have anti-business cognitions or attitudes that bias their coverage of business issues?

Empirical answers to these research questions could support one or more of the following conclusions:

*A positive correlation between the independent, situational variables and information seeking would suggest that individual information needs explain reporter communication behavior.

*A positive correlation between the situational variables and information processing would suggest that interorganizational or institutional factors explain reporter communication behavior.

*A positive correlation between the scores on the situational variables which reporters predict for their readers and either information seeking and processing would suggest that coorientational, individual-institutional, relationships explain reporter communication behavior.

*Consistent and positive correlations between the situational variables and the cognitive and attitudinal variables for all four issues would suggest that reporters have consistent pro- or anti-business beliefs and attitudes. No correlation or inconsistent correlations on the four issues would suggest that reporters do not have consistent beliefs or attitudes about business. These correlations should suggest whether each reporter public functions as an advocate or as a gatekeeper, as defined by Janowitz.

We also asked a third research question to help identify the reporter publics that result from the canonical correlation analysis:

Q3: What are the demographic, educational, professional, and attitudinal attributes of the Washington reporter publics identified by a canonical correlation analysis?

METHODS

Fourteen graduate students enrolled in the Seminar in Public Relations Publics at the University of Maryland interviewed 160 Washington reporters working for newspapers and wire services sampled randomly from Hudson's Washington News Media Contacts Directory and the Congressional Directory.29 The reporters sampled came from all beats, not just the business/economic beats, as business policy issues are political as well as economic issues. The 160

completed interviews represented a 71 percent response rate. The questions used to measure the theoretical concepts described in the previous section were almost identical to the questions used in a previous study of corporate publics resulting from government policy issues.30

Canonical correlation was used to test the first two research questions posed in the study. Canonical correlation simulataneously correlates several independent variables with several dependent variables--in this study, we correlated the reporters' self and predicted reader scores for problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement with the dependent communication behaviors and effects. At the same time, canonical correlation produces one or more canonical variates that are much like the factors that result from factor analysis. Those variates were used to identify the different reporter publics brought about by the four business policy issues used in this study. To determine the importance of each variable in defining the canonical variates, the canonical variate scores were correlated with the original variables, following the advice of Levine.31

We dichotomized the cognition and attitude variables by whether each respondent had a cognition or attitude before entering them into the canonical correlation analysis--because the theory predicts whether people have a cognition or an attitude and not the direction of the cognition or attitude. To determine whether the reporter publics had a bias for or against business, however, we later correlated each person's canonical variate scores with the direction of the cognitive and attitudinal variables--for those reporters who said they had a cognition or attitude.

We addressed the third research question by placing each reporter respondent into one public--as determined by the canonical variate on which he or she had the highest score. We then used discriminant analysis to determine whether several demographic, educational, or professional variables would descriminate between the publics. These variables included age, education, education in journalism, coursework in business and economics, sex, professionalism (based on membership in professional organizations and the amount of activity in those organizations), the perceived credibility of business executives and public relations practitioners, cross-situational attitudes toward business and government, political philsophy, and covering a business or science/environmental beat.

RESULTS

Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations for problem recognition, level of involvement, constraint recognition, and presence of a referent criterion on each of the four issues for the reporters themselves and as they predicted their readers would answer the questions that measured these concepts. These data confirm the expectation that reporters would perceive a higher involvement in the 'deregulation of natural gas' and 'chemical disposal sites' issues--both for themselves and their readers. Problem recognition and referent criterion scores were also highest for these two issues. Constraint recognition, however, was highest for the Bail system issue and lowest for the chemical disposal sites issue.

Comparison of the self and perceived reader scores shows that reporters generally believed they and their readers would have

about the same level of involvement and constraint recognition on each of the four issues. But, the data show that reporters believe themselves more likely to recognize the four issues as problems and--especially--to have a solution--a referent criterion--for the issues than their readers.

Research Question 1. The first research question asked what kinds of reporter publics would result from canonical correlation of the independent and dependent variables of the situational theory. The canonical correlation analysis yielded five variates significant at the .05 level or above--using the criterion of a significant reduction in Wilks Lambda, an inverse measure of the amount of variance explained by a variate (Table 2). The variates show that the communication behavior of some reporters can be explained by individual factors, for some by institutional factors, and for others by both.

We called the reporter public described by the first variate the ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTERS. They are reporters who report what they are interested in themselves--their behavior can be explained by individual variables. At the same time, they perceived their readers to have the same interests as they--although that perception could be wishful thinking.

This type of reporter had high problem recognition and level of involvement and low constraint recognition both for themselves and their readers on the chemical disposal site and acid rain issues. The correlations on the other two issues generally were low or negative. On the acid rain and chemical disposal issues, this reporter type can be described as what I have called a High-Involvement, Problem-Facing Public--a public that has a high proba-

bility of both seeking and processing information.32 The reporters in this public also perceive that their readers will see these two environmental issues in the same way as they do.

The dependent variables confirm this expected high probability of communication behavior. On both issues, the first variate correlates highly with information seeking, information processing, and the number of articles the reporters wrote on each of the topics during the last year. The presence of a referent criterion--both for the reporters and their readers--also correlated highly with this variate. There are also positive, but generally small, correlations with having a position on the pro- and anti-business cognitions and on the evaluative attitude question.

The second variate--which we named the SELF-READER BELL/SELF ENVIRONMENT public--described a reporter public for whom both the self and predicted reader correlations suggested a High-Involvement, Problem-Facing public on the Bell System issue. These reporters also had high problem recognition, high involvement, and low constraint recognition themselves on the disposal sites and acid rain issues. But, they did not perceive their readers to have as high a level of problem recognition and involvement on these two environmental issues.

The behavior of these reporters can be explained both by individual and institutional factors. They report what they are interested in, as long as they also think it will interest their readers. If they are interested in a topic that does not interest their readers, they do not report it.

As the theory would predict, all of the dependent variables for the Bell issue correlate positively with this second variate.

The reporters described by this variate said they would seek and process information about the Bell issue and that they had actually written stories about it. They also said they had a referent criterion and hold cognitions and attitudes about the issue. On the environmental issues, however, these reporters said they would seek and process information, but that they have not actually written many stories about the issues. These reporters also hold a referent criterion on both environmental issues, but are not especially likely to hold the cognitions or attitude measured.

The third variate, which describes what we called the DEREGULATION OF NATURAL GAS public, suggest a reporter public that is much like one typical public found in many other of our studies of publics--a public that takes an interest only in those issues that involve nearly everyone.33 The behavior of this third reporter type clearly seems to be explained by institutional factors. These reporters take an interest in business issues only when they perceive the public to have great interest.

In this study, the deregulation of natural gas was, with little doubt, the issue with the greatest potential consequences on people. Yet, even on this issue, the self and reader correlations with problem recognition and level of involvement are only moderately high, and the correlations with constraint recognition are small but positive. This configuration of correlations describes what I have called a High-Involvement, Constrained public--a public with moderately high probabilities of information seeking and processing. This reporter type also sees itself and its readers as constrained from doing anything about the other issues, although it does have moderately high problem recognition and involvement it-

self on the acid rain issue.

The correlations of the third variate with the dependent variables were consistent with the correlations with the independent variables. The reporters described by this variate said they will process information about natural gas deregulation, but that they are less likely to seek it. They do report that they have written articles about the topic, however. These reporters also say they would process information about chemical disposal sites and acid rain, and that they have written articles about both in the last year. They hold a referent criterion only on the natural gas issue and believe their readers hold one also. They are not particularly likely to hold cognitions or attitudes on any of the issues, however.

The fourth variate describes reporters--the READER BELL/SELF ENVIRONMENT public--who ignore their perception of what readers want and report in accord with their own interests. These reporters perceive their readers to be a High-Involvement Problem Facing public on the Bell issue but not to be interested in the other issues. The independent variables show that these reporters would not be likely to communicate about the Bell issue themselves. They would be moderately likely to communicate about the chemical sites and acid rain issues themselves but they do not perceive that their readers would. The dependent variables confirm that these reporters report their own interests, not their readers'. They also are not especially likely to hold cognitions or attitudes on any of the issues, although they have a referent criterion on all four.

We have called the reporters described by the fifth variate a READER ENVIRONMENT public, reporters with no particular self reason

to communicate about any of the four issues. For these reporters, institutional factors prevail; individual factors have little impact. These reporters report the chemical disposal and acid rain issues because they perceive their readers to be moderately likely to recognize these two issues as problems. These reporters also perceive that the acid rain and chemical disposal issues involve both them and their readers. They also believe their readers have referent criteria for the two issues, although they do not have them themselves.

In general, there were few positive correlations between this variate and the dependent variables. These reporters say they would seek information about acid rain and chemical disposal, and they have actually written about these two issues. Yet, the correlations are small. Evidently, these reporters write about the two environmental issues because they are there and they think their readers might have some interest.

Research Question 2. The second research question asked whether the reporter publics identified by the canonical variates would have cognitions or attitudes that might bias their reporting about business policy. In the canonical correlation, we included variables that indicated whether the reporter respondents had SOME cognition or attitude. For this research question, therefore, we correlated the direction of the reporters' cognitions and attitudes with the canonical variates--for those reporters who had cognitions and attitudes.

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the entire sample for the pro- and anti-business cognitions, hedging (believing both cognitions), wedging (believing one cognition but not the

other), and a pro-business attitude for each of the four issues. Table 3 suggests that reporters do hold beliefs and attitudes on these issues, but that these beliefs and attitudes change with the situation. Reporters do not seem to consistently favor or disfavor business.

The data in Table 3 show that Washington reporters generally believe the anti-business cognition--and wedge to some extent--on three of the four issues: break-up of the Bell System, chemical disposal sites, and acid rain. For deregulation of natural gas, however, they believe both cognitions--and hedge. The attitude question shows a slightly pro-business attitude on the deregulation and Bell issues and a slightly anti-business attitude on chemical disposal and acid rain.

Table 4 displays the correlations between the five canonical variates and the cognition and attitude variables. The correlations show that only one reporter public has a consistent anti-business bias--the public defined by the first variate, the ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTERS. These reporters consistently believe the anti-business cognitions and wedge out the pro-business cognitions, especially on the chemical disposal and acid rain issues. The 'environmental reporters' were also the reporters most likely to follow their own information needs when they reported business issues.

The DEREGULATION OF NATURAL GAS public has strong pro-business cognitions and attitudes on the Bell System issue. And, the READER ENVIRONMENT public had positive, but small, correlations with anti-business attitudes on three of the four issues. In general, however, four of the five reporter publics showed an essentially neutral pattern of cognitions and attitudes.

Table 5 displays correlations of hedging and wedging with the two cognitive variables that made up the hedging and wedging scales and the attitude measure. Those correlations were calculated to see if a result from the previous study of public cognitions and attitudes toward business would repeat itself for reporters.34 It did. Most of the general public respondents in the previous study and the reporters in this study held an anti-business cognition--they believed the bad things about business. If they also held a pro-business cognition, they did not drop the anti-business cognition. They would hedge the two. Pro-business attitudes, therefore, correlated with hedging. Anti-business attitudes correlated with wedging.

Research Question 3. The final research question asked if 13 demographic, educational, professional, and attitudinal variables could discrimate between--identify the characteristics of--the reporters described by the five canonical variates. When the repondents were placed into the reporter public for which they had the highest canonical variate score, approximately the same number fit into each group. The largest public, however, was that represented by the fifth variate, the READER ENVIRONMENT public, which represented 25 percent of the sample. Next largest was the public represented by the first variate, the ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTERS public, which represented 22 percent of the sample.

Based on the Wilks Lambda criterion, none of the discriminant functions significantly discriminated among these five publics, except when a step-wise analysis eliminated all but two of discriminating variables, age and sex. Table 6 displays the maximum four discriminant functions, however, as they did improve the

ability of the computer program to correctly classify the reporters into publics from the 20 percent that would have occurred by chance to 40 percent.

The first function discriminates the the ENVIRONMENTAL and READER BELL/SELF ENVIRONMENT publics from the other three. These two environmentally oriented reporters were younger and more likely to be female. They also were less educated and more likely to have journalism education and business and economics courses. They were low on the professionalism scale (did not participate in professional associations) and were likely to have a science/environment beat and not a business beat. They did not, however, have anti-business, pro-government, or liberal political attitudes.

The second function shows that the SELF AND READER BELL/SELF ENVIRONMENT public was older than the other four publics, believed business executives to be more credible and business PR leaders not to be credible, and to be conservative yet anti-business and pro-government. Neither the third nor fourth function suggests particularly meaningful conclusions. The third function discriminates the DEREGULATION OF NATURAL GAS public from the SELF AND READER BELL/-SELF ENVIRONMENT and READER ENVIRONMENT publics. The fourth function discriminates the ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTER public from the READER BELL/SELF ENVIRONMENT publics.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine how Washington reporters cover business policy issues and to explain why they report this news as they do. We wanted to determine whether individual, organizational, or institutional factors explain reporter behavior. Organizational variables were dropped from this study, however,

because the literature and a pre-test showed they had little effect on these relatively autonomous Washington reporters. Finally, we wanted to know whether Washington reporters have a bias against business that predisposes them to seek out anti-business news.

Of the five reporter publics found in this study, two appear to be motivated by their individual information needs--the ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTERS public and the READER BELL/SELF ENVIRONMENT public. Both types of reporters appear to be activist reporters, particularly environmental activists. Only the ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTERS hold anti-business cognitions or attitudes, however. Both reporter publics tend to consist of younger, female reporters who cover the science or environmental beat in Washington.

One additional public--the SELF AND READER BELL/SELF ENVIRONMENT public--also follows its personal information needs in gathering news, but only as long as it believes that news also meets its readers' information needs. The other two reporter publics--the DEREGULATION OF NATURAL GAS and READER ENVIRONMENT publics--clearly seem to be controlled by institutional factors. They report news that affects everyone or that they think interests their readers. They have no strong information needs themselves that they meet as reporters. None of these last three reporter publics have an anti-business bias. Probably, they have not constructed ordered cognitions about business in their mind and have not bothered to evaluate those cognitions seriously.

These results show that business efforts to educate or persuade general reporters to the business point-of-view will have little effect. Washington reporters do not cover the negative aspects of business because they know little about and dislike busi-

ness. Activist environmental reporters, in contrast, cover the environmental sins of business, not because they dislike business, but because they have a personal interest in the environment. Other reporters pay little attention to business and economic issues unless they think it affects their readers. And, business affects readers most when it does something that has negative consequences on people. Previous research shows that nonreporter publics react to business issues in the same way--most are not interested unless business affects them directly.35

Washington reporters who do not fit the two active environmental publics appear from our data to have little interest in covering the positive aspects of business--e.g., why a single Bell System is good for the country. It's not that they dislike business; they're just not interested. This confirms Hess's conclusion that for most Washington reporters, business and economics are subjects "most wish would go away," even though most cover a lot of business and economic issues. Washington reporters, instead, "consider themselves experts on politics and would like to be experts on foreign policy."36

What can be done to get reporters to cover business more actively and enthusiasically in the same way that science and environmental reporters cover their beats--motivated by their self interest as well as institutional demands? The answer seems quite simple. Train more specialized business/economics reporters in the same way that specialized science reporters are trained. Then they would have a personal interest in understanding business and making sense out of it for their readers.

FOOTNOTES

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3. Ibid, p. 392.

4. S. Prakash Sethi, "The Schism Between Business and American News Media," Journalism Quarterly 54:240-247 (1977); Joseph R. Dominick, "Business Coverage in Network Newscasts," Journalism Quarterly 58:179-185 (1981).

5. James E. Grunig, "An Assessment of Economic Education Programs for Journalism Students," paper presented to the Public Relations Division, Association for Education in Journalism, Houston, August 1979.

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10. Morris Janowitz, "Professional Models in Journalism: the Gatekeeper and the Advocate," Journalism Quarterly 52: 618-626 (1975).

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12. D. Charles Whitney, "Mass Communicator Studies: Similarity, Difference, and Level of Analysis," in James S. Ettema and D. Charles Whitney (eds.), Individuals in Mass Media Organizations: Creativity and Constraint (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982), pp.241-254.

13. Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald E. Shaw, "Structuring the Unseen Environment," Journal of Communication 26:18-28 (Spring 1976).

14. Gaye Tuchman, Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality (New York, Free Press, 1978).

15. Whitney, op. cit., p. 251.

16. Stephen Hess, The Washington Reporters (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1981, pp. 3-9.

17. Dunwoody reached the same conclusion from a study of how science reporters covered the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Sharon Dunwoody, "The News-Gathering Behaviors of Specialty Reporters: A Comparison of Two Levels of Analysis in Mass Media Decision-Making," paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism, Houston, 1979.

18. Leon V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1973), p. 1 1.

19. Percy Tannenbaum, "Communication of Science Information," Science 140:579-583 (1963).

20. Hess, op. cit., p. 11.

21. Most recently, James E. Grunig, "The Message-Attitude-Behavior Relationship: Communication Behaviors of Organizations," Communication Research 9: 163-200 (April 1982).

22. Peter Clarke and F. Gerald Kline, "Media Effects Reconsidered: Some New Strategies for Communication Research," Communication Research 1:224-240 (1974).

23. Herbert Krugman, "The Impact of Television Advertising: Learning Without Involvement," Public Opinion Quarterly 29:349-356 (1965).

24. Grunig, "The Message-Attitude-Behavior Relationship," op. cit.

25. Grunig, "An Assessment of Economic Education Programs for Journalism Students," op. cit.

26. The same four-cell matrix was used to choose corporate policy issues to identify publics in ibid.

27. Keith R. Stamm and James E. Grunig, "Communication Situations and Cognitive Strategies in Resolving Environmental Issues," Journalism Quarterly 54:713-720 (1976) and James E. Grunig and Keith R. Stamm, "Cognitive Strategies and the Resolution of Environmental Issues: A Second Study," Journalism Quarterly 56:715-726 (1979).

28. For a complete conceptualization of the difference between these cognitive and attitudinal variables, see Grunig, "Message-Attitude-Behavior Relationship," op. cit.

29. Students, who worked as equal partners with the author in designing and completing the study, included Becki Holder, John Weber, Tereza Levy, Kate Elmore, Shirley Watt, George Cleland, Debra Nelson, Daniel Ipes, Joanne Little, Keith Singh, Susan Visconage, Shannon Spillane, Wanda Baldwin, and Eugene Jeffers.

30. For more complete detail on the measures of the concepts used here, see Grunig, "The Message-Attitude Behavior Relationship," op. cit.

31. Mark S. Levine, Canonical Analysis and Factor Comparison, Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences No. 6, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1977, pp. 18-20. The correlations represent the importance of each variable in defining the canonical variate better than canonical coefficients, just as factor loadings represent the importance of variables in factor analysis better than factor score coefficients. Canonical coefficients underestimate the contribution of a variable that is highly correlated with another variable.

32. For a complete conceptualization of the kinds of publics identified by the combinations of independent, situational variables, see Grunig, "The Message-Attitude-Behavior Relationship," op. cit. or James E. Grunig, "A New Measure of Public Opinions on Corporate Social Responsibility," Academy of Management Journal 22:738-764 (1979).

33. For one example, of this kind of public see, Grunig, "The Message-Attitude-Behavior Relationship," op. cit. For a more complete description of typical publics, see James E. Grunig and Todd T. Hunt, Managing Public Relations (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, in press), Chapter 7.

34. Grunig, "The Message-Attitude-Behavior Relationship," op. cit.

35. Grunig, "A New Measure of Public Opinions on Corporate Social Responsibility," op. cit.

36. Hess, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Four Situational Variables, For Self and as Estimated for Readers

		Deregulation of Natural Gas	Break-up of Bell System	Chemical Disposal Sites	Acid Rain
		(Scale = 1-4)			
Problem Recognition					
Mean:	Self	2.78	2.29	3.13	2.78
	Readers	2.54	1.98	2.84	2.36
SD:	Self	.72	.84	.74	.85
	Readers	.73	.66	.80	.84
Level of Involvement					
Mean:	Self	3.12	2.45	2.92	2.53
	Readers	2.97	2.27	2.90	2.42
SD:	Self	.79	.85	.82	.87
	Readers	.82	.86	.86	.93
Constraint Recognition					
Mean:	Self	2.81	3.10	2.46	2.78
	Readers	2.88	3.13	2.34	2.76
SD:	Self	.77	.83	.85	.77
	Readers	.94	.92	.99	.97
Referent Criterion					
Mean:	Self	2.98	2.52	3.03	2.62
	Readers	2.41	2.04	2.62	2.05
SD:	Self	.89	.98	.82	.95
	Readers	.82	.76	.89	.79

TABLE 2

Pearson Correlations of Canonical Variates
with Variables Used to Determine Variates

	Variates				
	Environment	Self Environ./Bell	Natural Gas	Reader Bell/ Self Environ.	Reader Environ.
Independent Variables					
Deregulation of Natural Gas					
Problem Recognition: Self	-.17	-.10	.20	.06	-.08
Reader	.20	-.06	.22	.09	-.08
Level of Involvement: Self	-.20	-.13	.24	.18	-.13
Reader	-.03	-.24	.15	.30	-.32
Constraint Recognition: Self	.10	-.26	.08	-.10	-.06
Reader	.06	-.26	.11	-.31	-.06
Break-up of Bell System					
Problem Recognition: Self	-.48	.60	-.10	-.07	.05
Reader	-.17	.18	-.56	.28	.00
Level of Involvement: Self	-.21	.34	-.44	.19	.00
Reader	.03	.29	-.52	.13	-.05
Constraint Recognition: Self	.24	-.38	.28	-.37	-.23
Reader	.04	-.46	.35	-.33	-.05
Chemical Disposal Sites					
Problem Recognition: Self	.52	.17	.07	.14	.12
Reader	.51	-.23	-.10	-.03	.26
Level of Involvement: Self	.27	.15	-.11	.09	.24
Reader	.27	-.21	-.17	.04	.27
Constraint Recognition: Self	-.33	-.33	.09	.27	.05
Reader	-.24	-.04	.14	.09	-.22
Acid Rain					
Problem Recognition: Self	.60	.30	.26	.25	.12
Reader	.66	.00	-.05	.03	.25
Level of Involvement: Self	.37	.41	.16	.34	.40
Reader	.48	.11	-.02	.03	.12
Constraint Recognition: Self	-.52	-.39	.04	-.04	.07
Reader	-.37	-.26	.13	-.14	.05

(continued on next page)

TABLE 2 (continued)

Pearson Correlations of Canonical Variates
with Variables Used to Determine Variates

Dependent Variables	Variates				
	Environment	Self Environ./Bell	Natural Gas	Reader Bell/ Self Environ.	Reader Environ.
Deregulation of Natural Gas					
Information Processing	-.06	.06	.10	-.19	-.28
Information Seeking	-.18	-.08	-.04	-.07	.06
Articles Written	-.10	-.19	.31	.07	.09
Referent Criterion: Self	-.18	-.09	.35	.12	-.03
Reader	.18	-.24	-.13	-.07	-.33
Hold Pro-Business Cognition	.02	.07	-.07	-.15	-.16
Hold Anti-Business Cognition	.05	.02	-.08	-.04	-.18
Hold Attitude	.06	.00	-.06	.06	-.14
Break-up of Bell System					
Information Processing	-.20	.42	-.02	-.21	.06
Information Seeking	-.25	.55	-.13	-.14	.21
Articles Written	-.48	.44	-.06	-.16	-.05
Referent Criterion: Self	-.15	.48	-.16	.48	-.23
Reader	.23	.22	-.58	.28	-.29
Hold Pro-Business Cognition	-.13	.06	-.03	.16	-.15
Hold Anti-Business Cognition	-.11	.21	-.17	.07	-.21
Hold Attitude	-.11	.20	-.11	.08	-.17
Chemical Disposal Sites					
Information Processing	.17	.26	.18	-.24	-.11
Information Seeking	.16	.37	-.06	.04	.21
Articles Written	.44	.03	.23	.23	.29
Referent Criterion: Self	.39	.39	.06	.19	-.22
Reader	.42	-.02	-.15	.03	.20
Hold Pro-Business Cognition	.03	.10	-.09	-.04	-.18
Hold Anti-Business Cognition	.12	.02	.05	-.04	-.03
Hold Attitude	.08	.03	-.08	-.01	-.15
Acid Rain					
Information Processing	.32	.33	.41	-.43	-.02
Information Seeking	.26	.32	-.05	-.25	.13
Articles Written	.45	.08	.44	.31	.10
Referent Criterion: Self	.54	.23	.17	.32	.10
Reader	.56	.22	-.07	.14	.38
Hold Pro-Business Cognition	.31	-.05	.00	.09	-.02
Hold Anti-Business Cognition	.13	.06	-.08	.00	-.01
Hold Attitude	.18	.08	-.01	-.01	-.04
Canonical Correlation	.87	.81	.80	.78	.73
Chi Square of Wilks Lambda	1134.93	973.24	849.23	733.17	626.66
	768df,.00	713df,.00	660df,.00	609df,.00	560df,.03

TABLE 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Cognition and Attitude Variables, by Issue

	Pro-Business Cognition	Anti-Business Cognition	Hedging	Wedging	Pro-Business Attitude
Range	1-5	1-5	2-10	0-4	1-5
Deregulation of Natural Gas					
Mean	3.37	3.87	6.03	1.23	3.16
Standard Deviation	1.13	1.00	2.19	1.25	1.18
n	144	145	141	141	137
Break-up of Bell System					
Mean	2.49	4.04	4.67	1.83	3.07
Standard Deviation	1.16	.82	1.99	1.25	2.02
n	137	136	129	129	123
Chemical Disposal Sites					
Mean	1.70	2.95	3.11	1.49	2.06
Standard Deviation	.88	1.12	1.40	1.15	1.04
n	148	144	140	140	145
Acid Rain					
Mean	2.46	3.98	4.71	1.74	2.15
Standard Deviation	1.01	.89	1.83	1.43	.86
n	132	143	130	130	136

TABLE 4

Pearson Correlations of Cognition and Attitude Variables with the Canonical Variates, by Direction

	N	Environ.	Self Env./Bell	Natural Gas	Reader Bell Self Envir.	Reader Environ.
Deregulation of Natural Gas						
Pro-Business Cognition	133	-.14*	-.13	-.03	-.11	.03
Anti-Business Cognition	133	-.02	.12	-.02	-.05	-.01
Hedging	130	-.14*	-.01	-.09	-.16*	.04
Wedging	130	.13	-.02	.12	.15*	-.05
Pro-Business Attitude	113	-.20**	-.07	-.03	.06	.09
Break-up of Bell System						
Pro-Business Cognition	126	-.23**	-.10	.26**	.02	.16*
Anti-Business Cognition	124	.06	.08	-.21**	-.07	.13
Hedging	118	-.12	-.05	.25**	.01	.19*
Wedging	118	.05	.07	-.30**	-.07	-.05
Pro-Business Attitude	113	.01	-.15*	.22**	-.02	-.24**
Chemical Disposal Sites						
Pro-Business Cognition	137	-.24**	.01	-.09	.06	.06
Anti-Business Cognition	133	.04	.07	-.13	-.05	.08
Hedging	130	-.26**	.03	-.07	.06	-.09
Wedging	130	.20**	.01	-.09	-.09	.19*
Pro-Business Attitude	133	-.09	-.09	-.17*	.03	-.18*
Acid Rain						
Pro-Business Cognition	121	-.47**	.02	-.12	-.12	-.02
Anti-Business Cognition	131	.43**	.09	.06	.00	-.08
Hedging	119	-.33**	.02	-.11	-.10	.00
Wedging	119	.41**	.00	.09	.06	-.01
Pro-Business Attitude	125	-.33**	-.08	.00	-.12	-.15*

*p<.05
**p<.01

TABLE 5

Pearson's Correlations Between Cognitive Strategies and Attitudes

	Pro-Business Cognition	Anti-Business Cognition	Pro-Business Attitude
Hedging			
Deregulation of Natural Gas	.74**	.28**	.32**
Break-up of Bell System	.95**	-.09	.37**
Chemical Disposal Sites	.85**	.21**	.15*
Acid Rain	.87**	-.32**	.50**
Wedging			
Deregulation of Natural Gas	-.59**	.06	-.36**
Break-up of Bell System	-.71**	.62**	-.39**
Chemical Disposal Sites	-.30**	.73**	-.18*
Acid Rain	-.72**	.67**	-.54**

*p<.05
**p<.01

TABLE 6

Discriminant Analysis of Reporter Types by Demographics

Discriminating Variables	Discriminant Function Coefficients			
	Function 1	Function 2	Function 3	Function 4
Age	.07	.54	-.53	-.02
Education	.33	-.34	-.52	.18
Journalism Education	-.15	.06	.03	-.57
Business and Economics Courses	-.13	.09	-.01	-.03
Credibility of Business Executives	-.20	.60	.12	.33
Credibility of Business PR	.28	-.32	.69	-.44
Pro-Business Attitude	.02	-.54	-.34	.69
Pro-Government Attitude	.12	.23	-.26	-.12
Conservative Political Philosophy	.04	.38	-.15	-.02
Male Sex*	.77	.10	.29	-.18
Professionalism Scale	.23	-.04	.19	-.11
Business Beat	.41	-.12	.28	.38
Science/Environment Beat	-.25	-.12	.48	.44
Groups (Type)	**Centroids**			
Environment	-.52	-.16	.02	-.45
Self Environment/Bell	.11	.69	-.22	-.02
Natural Gas	.37	.08	.56	.00
Reader Bell/Self Environment	-.57	-.09	.03	.24
Reader Environment	.42	-.36	-.22	.02
Canonical Correlation	.40	.35	.27	.20
Wilks Lambda	.65	.78	.89	.96
Chi Square(1)	41.08	23.80	11.39	3.99
	52df,ns	36df,ns	22df,ns	10df,ns

Correct Classifaction into Groups: 40.2% (compared to 20% by chance)

*p<.05
**p<.01
(1) When a step-wise procedure was used, one function was significant at the .05 level, based on the Chi-square of Wilks Lambda, but only two variables, age and sex, were included. The first and fourth types were younger and female, the second, third, and fifth types were older and male.